

How Do We Pray?

Donna Nedrow
Faith United Church of Christ
Richmond Heights, Ohio

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Psalms 61; Jeremiah 17:7-8, 14; Romans 8:26-30

"For we do not know how to pray as we ought" - Romans 8:26

When I began to think about what I was going to talk about this morning this scripture verse came to mind and reminded me of a patient I had who said to me "I do not know how to pray... so how can I pray when I don't know how? Do I bow my head and say God please help me. I don't think God wants to hear my woes all the time and I know that I should pray for Thanksgiving but I am not sure what I am thankful for."

I really was not sure what to say in response to my patient so I took a deep breath and began to pray to God for Guidance and wisdom in helping my patient feel God's presence and help me not to mess up with my response. I told him that I felt prayer is a way to a personal relationship with God and we find intimacy with God through communicating with Him in prayer. Whatever we feel we need to say to our God, we say it. I began to ask my patient what it was he wanted to say to God. He told me he was angry at God because he was dying and he was afraid because he had not talked to God in a very long time. He wanted to pray to God to help him not be afraid and to help his family be comforted and to not be alone. We sat together and prayed these things to God that day ... my patient died a peaceful death with his family at his bedside about 2 days later.

This patient allowed himself to talk with God and to share with God his desires and he regained his personal relationship with God.

Eugenia Brown, a history instructor at Edgewood College in Wisconsin sees prayer "not so much as a grocery list of wants or a way to change God's mind, but rather as a way to regain perspective in her relationship with God. We pray to deepen our relationship with God. We pray to remind ourselves of our place of humility, to remind ourselves that God is God, and we are not. God wants us to tell Him about our deepest concerns. He's genuinely moved by the desperate cries of our hearts. At the same time, His ear is also tuned to our basic, everyday needs"

Even though we may believe in God's love and assurance that God hears our prayers we often struggle to understand what exactly God wants us to pray about or how we should pray. Many times we hesitate to pray to God about certain needs because :

- We feel guilt over past mistakes, which leaves us feeling unworthy of God's attention and love.
- We've prayed for the same thing for months, and fear if the answer we are looking for doesn't come.
- Our need seems so simple and unimportant compared to what others face; we wonder if God would want to concern himself with something so small.

Our Doubts and fears must not keep us from prayer. God gives us the invitation to speak with him and He wants to hear from us. Life is filled with so many questions and

“How to pray and why pray” are two big questions.

Rabbi Harold Kushner's book , When Bad Things Happen to Good People has helped me to understand that there is nothing that you can't talk to God about. Harold Kushner writes about his pain after his son, Aaron died at 14 from a disease called progeria... rapid aging. Kushner's book is a book for people who have been “hurt by life, by death, by illness or injury, by rejection or disappointment. It is a book about God and what God means to people. Where can one turn for strength and hope?” Kushner tries to help others believe in God's goodness and Love even in the toughest of times. Kushner tries to help others find their personal relationship with their God.

Prayer relates directly to our relationship with God. A lot of questions in life cannot be answered in our finite understanding. But when we're faced with spiritual struggles and dilemmas, we can find comfort in knowing that one question has a simple answer: “Why should we pray?” There are so many reasons, but one answer of why we should pray comes because praying connects us with God. It's a way of helping us understand our relationship with God in our lives. We seek guidance and wisdom through prayer. It helps us to get through what seems impossible and it gives us purpose in this world.

So, How do we pray: Again, this is a question I have heard over and over again. It is also a question I have asked myself. How do you, each one out there pray? Do you recline to pray, bow your head in prayer, get on your knees or do you stand up straight, go into a room by yourself, speak loudly or silently? ... and what do you pray for. Yourself? Others? The world? Things?

When I am with a family member of a person who is dying they almost always ask, “What should we be praying for? Comfort, Love, Support? For this disease to Go away? For the pain to go away?” Many a times in my experience the person who is the one dying usually asks for comfort in knowing they are not alone. When someone is undergoing surgery or a test they are unsure of they tend to ask for comfort and guidance to deal with the unknown. I usually begin our prayer together thanking God for the time together and asking for God's presence to be upon us! Sometimes we are sitting at the bedside, holding hands or other times we are standing next to each other and then there are times when we are not even in each others physical presence.

Sometimes when I pray I am lying in bed getting ready to fall asleep and talk with God in silence, whereas other times I may be speaking loudly in front of a number of people or maybe in the shower in the morning singing praises to God... Not many people probably want to hear this singing but I would bet many of you do the same.

The prayer group here at Faith UCC meet every other month to pray for ourselves and for others. For joys and concerns. We study and support one another with these many questions regarding prayer. We have also formed the prayer quilt ministry where we take pieces of fabric and sew them together for someone who needs prayer. I am not a quilter or even a sewer but I know how important this ministry of prayer is and I have seen the comfort and hope one gets when they know someone has prayed for them. The first time I saw a prayer quilt I was visiting one of my Hospice patients and it was on top of him in his bed. He was enveloped with prayers. I was amazed by all the knots that were tied and all the prayers he had received. This man was very close to death; his daughter was at his bedside and began to tell me about the quilt and how comforted she was by knowing how many people prayed for him. Many whom she did not know. It gave us the chance to pray at his bedside for comfort, guidance and peace. When the prayer was over I began to tie a knot and was overcome with emotion. What a beautiful symbol

of love was this simple piece of fabric.

We did not get on our knees, or bow our heads instead we tied a knot of prayer on a piece of fabric...

There are many ways to pray: some do pray by getting on their knees, others pray lying down, sitting in a pew in church, quilting a prayer square, harvesting a garden, writing a card to a friend, singing a hymn, playing an instrument, walking in the park, painting a picture, writing a story or a poem. Whatever it is that gets you closer to God is prayer. I think about my father and mother who worked so hard to cut wood and make beautiful woodworking items for others. My dad would cut the wood and my mother would paint. I have one very special piece hanging in my kitchen that welcomes all who enter. This was given as a gift one year and I know the work that was put in it was out of love and prayer for myself and my family and all who enters my home. I think of the members of the choir, the bells, Mary, Joan, Don Post and others. They find it is their music that gives meaning to their place in the world, their voices and their hands that opens the way for them, to share God's love through music to each and everyone they meet. When the prayer square quilters here, at Faith sew the fabric, put in the ties, or make the labels they think about and pray for the recipient of the quilt. Even if they do not have a name at that time. These ladies sit together and count their own blessings, talk about the troubles they and others endure, and share the love of God with each other and to many who they have not met! I see a group of ladies who come together once an month and gain inspiration and support from one another. They have built a community of prayer! Not only for the one whom they are making the quilt for but also for each other.

How do you get closer to God? How do you pray? Do you go for walks on a beautiful day, sit silently by your bedside, go to church on Sunday mornings, Sing songs to God, play a musical instrument, sit in nature, visit with those in need, hold a hand with someone you care for, write a note to a friend, play with a pet, make a phone call? Can you think of something that you do in your life that embodies prayer and helps you in your relationship with God? You all know how to pray and how to get closer to God. Ephesians 6:18- states " And pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication". And With God and prayer all things are possible.

AMEN..